ETHAN WALKED THROUGH THE FIRE FOR YOU

ETHAN IS THE NEW NATHAN.

(sort of)

By Alba Pratalia

Ethan didn't arrive; he just *appeared*, like a glitch in reality that shrugged and decided to stay. The drawer he popped out of wasn't metaphor[0]ical—it was literally the bottom drawer of an old Ikea Malm that had survived three moves, one breakup, and a mysterious coffee stain that none of the saints who tolerated him dared to question. One day it stuck; next day it sighed open, and out crawled Ethan, blinking like someone freshly rebooted.

He looked suspiciously like Nathan—same attitude, same "please-don't-make-me-exist" eyebrows—but with the unmistakable Addendum: a faint aura of "I swear I'm trying this time." Nathan never had that. Nathan had vibes of "I will absolutely set fire to this room if it gets me out of a conversation."

Ethan had a past, though. The Land of Horror, he called it. That was his origin family: a chaotic ensemble of individuals who raised him with the tenderness of a malfunctioning blender. Holidays were battles, and birthdays were hostage situations.

His childhood motto: *dodge first, ask questions never.*

Then adulthood happened, and somehow—through clerical error or divine prank—he acquired a Current Family. They were saints. Actual saints. People who woke up early and smiled before coffee. People who remembered birthdays without Facebook. People who believed in things like boundaries and "talking about it." Ethan had no idea what "it" was, but nodded along.

The furry 4-paws were part of this holy household and ran their home with fluffy tyranny. They tolerated Ethan the way emperors tolerate jesters: amused, mildly concerned, and constantly waiting for him to fall down the stairs again. Which he did. Often.

And then there were his friends. "Friends" being a questionable term, because most of them were not people. Ethan's truest confidant was the desert, specifically a stretch of sand where he'd once ridden

a horse with no name. The horse had judged him the entire ride. The desert still did. It was fine; Ethan liked environments that didn't pretend to care.

He wasn't Nathan anymore. Nathan had been too dense, too heavy, too trapped in his own mythology. Ethan breathed lighter. Not better—just lighter. He walked differently, like someone who knew the past was a haunted house and the future was a prank waiting to happen.

And so Ethan began—not because he wanted to, but because the drawer had opened, and stories have a way of crawling out even when all you wanted was socks.

So, who is Ethan?

Ethan is the kind of human catastrophe you get when the universe mixes Nathan with a discount espresso machine, a childhood made of barbed wire,

and a stack of sitcom VHS tapes someone left in the rain.

Sure—he's still an alcoholic, hateful, resentful, depressed, bipolar, suicidal, existence-damning son of a bitch.
That part didn't get fixed.
He wakes up angry, goes to sleep angrier, and considers "hope" a personal insult.
He resents the sun. He resents the moon. He resents the concept of brunch.
Ethan is basically an emotional landfill where feelings go to die.

But—and here's where the Addendum kicks in—
Ethan also craves something Nathan never allowed himself to want: a corner of the world where he's *welcome*.
He wants the dingy bar where the stools wobble, the lighting is terminally depressed, and the bartender says his name like they actually mean it.
A place of soft lies and warm illusions.

A place where people cheer when he walks in, even if only because they need material for gossip later.

He wants that *Cheers* vibe.
He wants the tribal warmth of **hey, Ethan!**
He wants to pretend—just pretend—that he belongs somewhere, even if the universe keeps sliding passive-aggressive eviction notices under his door.

And Ethan also—god help him—believes every word of that other theme song, because it accidentally described his entire adult life:

Nobody told him life was gonna be this way:
Job? Joke.
Wallet? Flatlined.
Romantic history? A fossil record of catastrophe.
Permanently stuck in second gear? That's not a metaphor, that's his resting state.

But here's the kicker:
Ethan will be there for you.

You.
Yes, you.
He'll show up in the rain.
He'll buy you food when he can't afford his own.
He'll listen to your heartbreaks like they're sacred literature.
He'll defend you with the energy of a wounded raccoon.

Because deep down, Ethan knows no one will ever be there for him with that same ferocity.
So he compensates.
He over-gives.
He shows up too much, too intensely, too loyally.
He protects others the way he wishes someone—anyone—would protect him.

He's a mess with a heartbeat.
A disaster who loves too hard.
A cynic who secretly wants the world to surprise him just once by not being horrible.

That's Ethan:
Nathan 2.0
patched, cracked, dented,
still leaking emotional gasoline,
but somehow—miraculously—willing to keep
walking through the fire for people who don't even
know they need him.

Ethan, naturally—*obviously*—was also a depraved debauchee, the kind of man who made vice look like a full-time profession with benefits and dental.
The saints who tolerated him had long accepted that under the depressive symphonies, under the sitcom-theme-song sentimentality, under the pathetic loyalty and the existential tantrums, there lurked a filthy old reprobate built entirely out of wrong decisions and fermented liquids.

He was the sort of creature who could wander into a police station by accident and still end up in the drunk tank.
He didn't even need to do anything.

He just had a natural *"arrest me, I'm unsupervised"* vibe.

On good nights, Ethan was a disaster.
On bad nights, he was performance art.

He was a bum, he was a punk—
he was absolutely the old slut on junk, sprawled on some cot in some ward, looking like a Renaissance painting titled *Saint Ethan Receives the Holy IV Drip of Salvation.*
He was the scumbag they warned interns about.
The maggot who somehow kept crawling back for another round.
The cheap, lousy, foul-mouthed gutter-gremlin of a man who could make any insult sound autobiographical.

But he wore it all with the swagger of someone who understood one fundamental cosmic truth:

If life was going to treat him like trash,
he might as well be the filthiest diamond in the dumpster.

Ethan wasn't ashamed—he didn't even *believe* in shame.
Shame required the capacity for regret, and Ethan had burned through all his regret sometime around 2014 and replaced it with a bottomless jar of "yeah, and what?"

He was the kind of glorious, decrepit bastard who would stagger into a bar reeking of smoke, trauma, cheap whiskey, and bad decisions, slam a hand on the counter and growl:

"Pour me something that won't judge me."

And the bar—poor soul—usually did.

Because Ethan, in all his degeneracy, had charisma.
Not good charisma.
Not healthy, attractive charisma.

No.
He had the charisma of a raccoon in a trench coat
stealing chicken wings at 3 a.m.—
you don't know why you're fascinated,
but you can't look away.

A depraved debauchee?
Absolutely.
A shameless dirty old SOB?
Spectacularly.
A walking hazard to himself and others?
Daily.

And yet—there he was.
Still alive.
Still staggering.
Still Ethan.
A human catastrophe with a pulse,
and a future guaranteed to horrify everyone who loved him.

Ethan, being Ethan, never stopped at "tragic wreckage."

No, no—he had to go full deluxe edition: depraved debauchee, shameless dirtbag, premium filth with extra mileage.

He was the kind of old bastard who made bartenders sigh before he even walked in, just from the cosmic disturbance his aura caused.
A born reprobate.
A seasoned sensual delinquent.
A man whose moral compass didn't merely malfunction—it actively pointed toward every bad idea within a 20-km radius.

You could find him in a drunk tank the way you find pigeons near a dumpster: naturally, inevitably, biologically predestined.
He didn't even need to commit a crime.
Existing was sufficient misdemeanour.

He was a bum—
the kind of bum who could sleep on a sidewalk and wake up offended the asphalt hadn't made him coffee.

He was a punk—
not the cool leather-jacket kind, but the human-ashtray kind who smelled like regret, pharmacy receipts, and whatever the hell he rolled in last night.

He was an old slut on junk—
lying there like an expired saint on a hospital drip, his vital signs powered mainly by stubbornness and spite.

He was a scumbag,
a maggot,
a cheap lousy faggot—
the kind of slur-magnet whose existence alone made insults feel inadequate.
Language simply couldn't keep up with him.

Ethan was the man everyone avoided at parties unless they wanted a story that required legal counsel.
He was a sewer-gremlin with emotional debts older than some continents.

His soul was pickled.
His dignity was pawned.
His liver was sending daily resignation letters.

Yet he strutted through life—well, staggered—like a creature who knew he had hit rock bottom so hard he'd bounced, ricocheted, and now lived in the geological basement beneath rock bottom.

He didn't pretend to be better.
He didn't apologize.
He didn't hide.
He just existed, loudly, obscenely, extravagantly, as only a shameless, depraved, dirty old SOB could.

And that, in its own grotesque little way, made him unforgettable.

No man had ever arrived on this miserable planet with a love of liquor as fierce, innate, and downright spiritual as Ethan.
He wasn't a connoisseur—God forbid.
He didn't care about notes of caramel or oaky

finishes or "mouthfeel."
No.
Ethan loved **the plop**.

The holy, echoing, belly-deep *plop* of whiskey hitting a glass.

That sound alone could resurrect him from near-death.
He could be horizontal, one foot in the morgue, tubes everywhere, soul halfway out the exit door—and then *plop*.
Eyes open.
Vital signs stabilised.
Ethan restored, rebooted, rebaptized.

He loved watching a pint crown itself with that perfect creamy head, as if the beer were clearing its throat politely before ruining him.

He loved the violence of the first swallow—
the brutal, glorious uppercut of whiskey slamming into that hidden pressure point just below the heart,

the one spot on his anatomy that still responded to anything.

Down it went.
And Ethan would blink once—
twice—
and whisper, "Oh, that's the stuff,"
like some deranged monk achieving enlightenment for the fiftieth time.

Then came the pint.
Ah, the pint.
The loyal chaser.
The smooth afterglow.
The angel that followed the demon.
He found it beautiful—almost indecently beautiful—the way it soothed the fire he'd just thrown down his throat on purpose.

"Drink in moderation," said the world.

Ethan laughed.
A bark, a snort, a wheeze—whatever sound a man makes when he hears something profoundly stupid.

Moderation?
Ridiculous.
Absurd.
A concept for accountants and indoor plants.

To Ethan, moderation was the enemy of joy.
A bureaucratic limit imposed by people who had never known the poetry of a bottle emptying,
the romance of a shot glass reborn,
the symphony of a bar at one a.m. when sanity has already left and the night finally gets interesting.

Liquor wasn't a habit for Ethan.
It was devotion.
A calling.
A melody he was born knowing.

The plop.
The heat.

The pint.
The cycle.

It was ugly.
It was perfect.
It was Ethan.

Ethan, in the soft rot of evening, still found a crooked pleasure in drifting through streets and divey taverns—half wine, half melancholy—letting slip a couple of flimsy, disposable songs.
Little nothings.
Tunes tossed off into the stale air, shouted more than sung, as if volume could camouflage the stupid hope beneath them:
that someone, anyone, might notice that he was sad, or bored, or cracked open by doubts he pretended not to have.

But the moralists had done their work.
Not by closing bars—those were still standing, sagging, stubborn—but by shutting down the people inside them.

Morality had doused the fire in their chests.
Left the rooms lit, but empty.

The taverns looked the same, but the drinkers were gone.
The old regulars had peeled away: some to age, some to respectability.
Respectability—Ethan thought—was a kind of death that didn't even have the decency to be interesting.
They'd become doctors, husbands, professionals, seekers of maturity; they'd traded in their vices for routines, their chaos for calendars.
That was worse than dying.
That was embalming yourself while still walking around.

It was so easy returning to "normality."
Sliding back into the predictable sheep-line of tired, white faces marching toward mortgages and early bedtimes.
Ethan could've done it, if he'd been willing to lobotomize himself on cue.

He wasn't.

He wouldn't.

He knew exactly what flock waited for him, and he refused to bleat.
If the world demanded he return as just another docile wool-ball, fine.

He'd die a black sheep.
At least the black ones get remembered.

It was Brazil that finished polishing Ethan into the full-blown catastrophe he was always meant to be.
Not the beaches, not the music, not the heat—
no, it was **cachaça**, that sugarcane liquid devil, that tropical boot to the brainstem.
Once that stuff got into his bloodstream, Ethan wasn't a man anymore.
He was an ongoing incident.

He'd walk into a bar like a man entering a confessional—

urgent, direct, already guilty.
He didn't waste time with menus or words.
He reached for a glass, locked on like a barnacle,
and didn't release it for hours.
He drank right there.
He collapsed right there.
The only inconvenience he ever caused was the
logistics of dragging his carcass back out.

He'd come from town already singing—
loud, off-key, and with the confidence of someone
who believed he sounded like Sinatra.
In one hand, he'd carry a huge clay jug he'd been
suckling like a sacred cow.
He'd stagger down the road, bounce off ditches, zig-
zag like a malfunctioning shopping cart,
and wherever his body finally gave up, that was
where he'd nap.
He didn't choose the ground; the ground chose him.

And every single fall was a surprise.
Backward, like a folding chair.
Forward, like a dying pelican.

Slow-motion collapse.
Sudden face-plant.
Spinning pirouette into oblivion.
Straight-down drop like a sack of potatoes.
He had a whole choreography of disaster.

But as long as it was cachaça, Ethan fell *happy*.
It was the only happiness he trusted.

He'd shake the jug just to confirm it was truly full.
He never chugged the whole thing in one go—
said it looked "ugly," like a man trying too hard.
But with the first gulp, he'd drop it to halfway.
With the second, it was gone.
Two gulps, and he'd erased a small distillery.

He drank because he liked it—
the clear stuff, the yellow stuff, the stuff infused
with cloves, cinnamon, or whatever herbs the locals
swore would either cure him or kill him.
Rain or sunlight, heat or cold, carnival or Tuesday—
down went the cachaça.

Ah, damned cachaça.
The love of his miserable life.

So this *secondary* feature of Ethan's—as in, the catastrophic one, the decorative apocalypse stitched into his personality like embroidery—didn't limit itself to cachaça.
Not at all.
Cachaça was merely the tropical gateway drug to total liquefied doom.
Ethan's talent for self-destruction was beautifully democratic, equal-opportunity, cosmopolitan even.
He was a UNESCO World Heritage Site of alcoholism.

It manifested itself across the entire goddamn periodic table of booze.

Whisky?
He greeted it like an old war buddy.
The *plop* alone could make him weep tears aged twelve years in oak.

Gin?
He drank it with the dead-eyed calm of a Victorian widow.
If there was a bottle open, Ethan was already halfway through it.

Vodka?
That was his "I don't want to taste anything, I just want consequences" drink.

Tequila?
That one triggered memories Ethan didn't have—
which meant they weren't his—
which meant he'd probably stolen someone else's trauma by accident.

Rum?
He drank it like a pirate on unpaid leave.

Mezcal?
He pretended to appreciate the "smokiness,"
but really he just liked the way it made him walk diagonally.

Brandy, cognac, armagnac?
Those were for the nights he wanted to feel classy,
which lasted exactly twelve seconds
until he burped and ruined the illusion.

Grappa?
He treated it like a dare.
A punishment.
A reward.
All three at the same time.

Țuică and pálinka?
Eastern European cousins who punched him in the lungs and called it hospitality.
Ethan loved them for it.
Pain was intimacy.

Poitín?
Ah.
Moonshine that could strip paint off a tractor.
Ethan drank it like holy water.
His throat disagreed violently every time,
but that never stopped him.

He didn't discriminate.
He didn't analyse.
He didn't sip.
He simply existed in an ongoing, international diplomatic relationship with anything that fermented, distilled, burned, or evaporated on contact with oxygen.

It was, to Ethan, a *secondary* feature.
Totally unbothering.
Utterly unworrying.

To everyone else?

A catastrophe with a passport.

So Ethan stuck to the Creature—
capital C, because in his theology it absolutely deserved a proper noun—
the best damned thing in nature for drowning every sorrow he'd ever adopted
and raising whatever tattered scrap of joy he still had hiding under his ribs.

Moderation?
He spat that word out like it was rotten fruit.
"Hope to a nation," he said, "maybe. But
consolation?
Consolation is **poteen**, me boys."

One night—already glowing like a radioactive
saint—
Ethan slammed his jug down on the table and
declared,
"Come here, ye wretches. Guess me this riddle."

He got up, swaying like a clothesline in a storm,
pointed a dramatic finger at the poor souls who had
wandered too close,
and delivered his sermon:

"What beats pipes and fiddle?
What's hotter than mustard and wilder than cream?
What best wets your whistle?
What's clearer than crystal?
What's sweeter than honey and stronger than
steam?

What'll make the dumb talk?
What'll make the lame walk?
The elixir of life, the philosopher's stone—"

He spread his arms like a deranged archangel.
"—is right here in this jug, lads."

The Creature.
Poteen.
The Irish God of Poor Decisions.

"So stick to the creature!" Ethan roared,
half-inviting, half-threatening, fully glowing.
"The best thing in nature for drowning sorrows,
raising joys,
waking the dead, confusing the living,
and convincing the clergy to question their calling."

He took another long, reverent pull.
Eyes closed.
Soul exiting the body for a brief scenic tour.

"Oh Lord," he croaked, wiping his mouth,
"it's no wonder lightning and thunder were made
from the plunder
of poteen, me boys."

And for a moment—just a moment—
the whole tavern believed him.
Because Ethan, ruined fool that he was,
still knew how to preach the gospel of the bottle
better than any priest ever spoke of heaven.

You've surely noticed by now—unless you've been reading this with your eyes closed—that Ethan's saga, much like Nathan's before him, is absolutely riddled with cultural references, literary echoes, musical theft, and shameless quotations stitched in like decorative mold.

Why?
Why all the allusions?
Why the citations?
Why the constant smuggling of other people's
brilliance into Ethan's drunken odyssey?

Simple: the author—hi, yes, waving at you from behind the curtain—is lazy.

Sure, sure, we *could* pretend there's a majestic artistic lineage at play here.
We *could* say we're engaging with the intertextual tradition, weaving a rich tapestry of references in the noble spirit of Eliot's **The Waste Land**,
or Joyce's magpie-brained Ulysses,
or Borges playing hopscotch with entire libraries.

Yes, a very sophisticated defence could be made.
Footnotes could be written.
Papers presented.
A smug lecture or two delivered.

But let's not kid ourselves.
The authoress—still me, still right here—
is a tiny, slothful bitch.

Quoting is easier than inventing.
Alluding is faster than thinking.
Borrowing is more fun than working.

And besides, why wrestle with language when you can yank a perfectly good line from some dead genius and toss it in like seasoning?

So if you, dear reader, find yourself murmuring,
"Huh, wasn't that line from a poem?"
or
"Wait, is that a song lyric hiding in there?"
or
"Hold on, isn't that plag—"

Shhh.
Hush.
Be gentle.

This isn't plagiarism, darling.
This is **recycling**.
It's good for the planet.

And it keeps the writer—your lovable, lazy, reference-hoarding bitch of an authoress—from collapsing under the weight of original thought.

So welcome to Ethan's story:
half invention, half stolen goods,
all intentional,
all chaotic,
all mine.

So—you're sinking into Ethan's narrations now.
Welcome. Take your shoes off. Actually, don't.
You'll see why in a second.

Here, like in all decent entertainment, *everything is fake but nothing is false.*
This is the sweet spot, the magic zone, the neon-lit alley behind the cinema where stories smoke cigarettes and giggle about the gullible.

You, dear reader, have just been cast—without audition, without warning—as Bruce Willis in **Die Hard**.
Not young Bruce.
Not CGI Bruce.
No.

You're **peak hammy Bruce**, sweaty tank top,
emotional damage in every nostril flare.

Floor?
Absolutely covered in shattered glass.
Narrative shards everywhere.
Plot splinters, references, inside jokes, shards of
Ethan's liver—just a crystalline carpet of danger.

And what do you do?

You walk over it barefoot, gritting your teeth,
leaking courage and questionable decisions all over
the place.
Because that's what this story demands.
Because you're in it now, ankle-deep.

This isn't realism.
This is *commitment.*

This isn't literature.
This is you stepping on glittery pain while

muttering iconic catchphrases you didn't sign up for.

And since you're already here, inching forward with bloody soles and heroic confusion, there's only one thing left to say—

Yippee Ki-Yay, mother-reader.